

U. S. Army Pueblo  
Chemical Depot

# Honoring the Past, Looking to the Future

Pueblo Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant  
Groundbreaking Open House September 18, 2004



*For more than six decades the men and women of the Pueblo Chemical Depot have played a vital role in our nation's defense. I'm*

*honored to be part of that distinguished tradition as the installation's 29th commander.*

*Today we're beginning a new chapter in the depot's history as we prepare to safely destroy the stockpile of chemical weapons in accordance with national policy and international treaty commitments. Those of us working on this mission today have great role models in the thousands of dedicated depot employees who came before us.*

*This publication is our way of honoring the past contributions of those employees as we look to our future mission.*

John A. Becker  
Lieutenant Colonel  
Commander  
U. S. Army Pueblo Chemical Depot



**Pueblo Chemical Agent-  
Destruction Pilot Plant**

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*Special Edition of Pueblo Exchange*

**A Publication of the Pueblo Chemical Depot Community Outreach Office**

## **'Dirty Half Dozen' members value long-time friendships**

### **Kleinert feared big city traffic**

Friendships often come and go, but the "Dirty Half Dozen" just keeps chugging along.

Six women who were leaving the depot about 1976 vowed they would never lose track of each other. True to their word, the group got together at the old Furr's Cafeteria a couple of times a year. Then they decided they needed a name.

"I remembered the movie, *The Dirty Dozen*," Gloria Kleinert said recently. It was the World War II story, released in 1967, of a band of Americans, led by Lee Marvin, who stormed a fortified French chateau to wipe out German generals headquartered there.

But for the depot veterans, the name reflected their penchant for telling off-color stories, Kleinert said. "I said we should be the Dirty Half Dozen."

The name stuck and so did the friendships. Of the original members, the group has lost Elsie Doemkoeler who died in 1988.

It's not the only group of long-term friendships that have endured for Kleinert.

She and her late husband, Clancy, transferred to Pueblo in 1966 when Sioux Army Depot at Sidney, Neb., was closed. For Gloria Kleinert the move to the "big city" from Sidney, population 1,500, was daunting. She announced to Clancy that she was NOT going to drive in the city traffic out to the depot, although their shifts were only slightly different times.

Clancy was non-committal, but on their first day of work, he quietly tootled off in their Jeep, leaving her the Buick.

"Needless to say, I did drive to work. And I did fine with the traffic."

That night Clancy told her, "We'll be living in this city for a long, long time, and I'm not about to drive you every place you want to go."

Clancy retired in 1974 and passed away in 1988. She retired in 1976 and today drives a Honda. (She's now married to Lawrence Mellinger.)

And the big city, she says, has become "Home Sweet Home." ★

### **Filler recalls nine jobs, six divisions in 22 years**

One of the stalwart members of the Dirty Half Dozen, Phyllis Filler spent 22 of her 26 ½-year career at the Pueblo depot.

And she figures she held almost as many jobs as a person could during those years, nine jobs in six divisions. The only places she didn't work were the services branch, security and personnel.

Filler transferred to Pueblo from U.S. Army Black Hills Depot and remained here until 1978 when she began a two-year training program at the U.S. Army Savannah Depot to become an equipment specialist and subsequently interned at U.S. Army Sierra Depot.

By the 1980s, some of the World War II mustard agent munitions at the depot were beginning to show their age and the Army instituted a "drill and transfer" program to drain "leakers," clean them and safely store both the agent and residual metal. Again, Filler was writing procedures for the program, an exercise that produced a volume "that must have been four inches thick."

During her career, Filler was also known as Phyllis Gilkey and Phyllis Spalding until she married Carl Filler in 1984. He died last spring.

Although she didn't retire until 1988, the Dirty Half Dozen has been a delightful connection to other depot friends and the fierce pride she has for her years in the civilian service. "We just have fun.



*Fast friends since their days at the depot, the Dirty Half-Dozen get together often to talk and enjoy each other's company. From left to right, they are Gloria (Kleinert) Mellinger, who worked at the depot as a production controller; Irene Robinson, accounting technician; Velia (Trujillo) Leal, accountant; Ruth Miles, employee relations specialist; JoAnn (Ramsey) Day, accounting technician; Phyllis (Gilkey) Filler, equipment specialist; and Cleopatra Lopez, budget analyst-comptroller. This get-together is in the Pueblo home of Lawrence and Gloria Mellinger.*

We took the train up through the Royal Gorge; we even played miniature golf once." ★

# Honoring the Past, Looking to the Future

## Vorpagel fondly recalls long-ago comrade

Friendships formed during working days at the depot remain important in the memories of depot old-timers. Will Vorpagel tells of one of his old friends, Mac McPherson.

Vorpagel relates that McPherson was “just passing through Pueblo” in the early 1950s when a strange thing occurred. He stayed five years.

It happened when McPherson was visiting an old Navy shipmate. The chum bet him he could get a job at Pueblo Ordnance Depot. Sure enough, he did.

And McPherson and his wife, Minnie, settled down on Greenwood where they met neighbors, Will and Betty Vorpagel.

The Vorpagels still cherish the memory of that friendship, although Mac has passed away and they’ve lost track of Minnie.

But Vorpagel wants to be certain that McPherson is remembered, not only for his stint at the depot but his earlier Navy career, even though the couple moved on to San Jose, Calif., after his time at the depot.

According to Vorpagel, Mac joined the Navy about 1940 and served aboard a cruiser that was an aircraft carrier escort at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Minnie was evacuated to the United States and Mac went on to serve as a beach officer (warrant officer) on

Guadalcanal. He was unloading supplies during that battle of 1942-43 when he was wounded, but a passing Marine placed him in a foxhole.

Later Mac’s part of the landing had to be aborted, so the same Marine went back and carried him from the foxhole.

“Mac always believed the Marine saved his life that day,” Vorpagel said. The Vorpagels are back in Pueblo after his teaching career took him from Central Christian Church here to Denver and finally home again. ★

## Italian POWs part of depot history; some stayed

A little known fact about the depot is that Italian prisoners of war were interned there in 1944-5 during World War II. According to the archives of *The Pueblo Chieftain* newspaper, an appeal was issued in September of 1944 to personnel at the Pueblo Air Base to help establish an understanding with the Italian soldiers working at the depot. Many Pueblo old timers remember that local families hosted the Italian soldiers to dinner in their homes.

An August 27, 1944, article in the *Pueblo Star-Journal* quotes depot commander Lieutenant Colonel R. S. Barr as saying, “... personnel of the Italian quartermaster service unit now permanently stationed at this depot are duly sworn members of the Army of the United States.” According to the article, the Italians did not work in ammunition areas, but relieved workers in other areas of the depot so they could work as ammunition handlers. The article also said the Italians had pass privileges to go into Pueblo, but only under American military supervision.

According to other newspaper reports, the Italians were paid 80 cents per day, one-third of that amount in cash and the rest in coupons for items purchased at the depot post exchange. A *Star-Journal* article in January 1945 shows the Italian soldiers attending English language classes, taught daily at 6:30 a.m. by U. S. Army soldiers.

Newspaper articles published in 1947 tell the stories of two Italian prisoners who married women they met while in Pueblo and settled here after the war. ★



In this historic photo, the Italian prisoners are loading ice on top of a refrigerated rail car at American Refrigeration Transit in the rail yards west of the Fourth Street Bridge in Pueblo.



## 'Depot baby' remembers her family's early days

The house was probably strewn with toys and her baby fussy when the commander's wife made her unannounced, formal call on the young lieutenant's wife one afternoon during World War II.

The formal protocol required of officers and their families who lived on Pueblo Ordnance Depot was daunting to Marjorie Multer, a young mother from rural Kansas and the wife of newly commissioned Lt. Carl S. Multer Jr.

But Shirley Barr, the wife of then-Col. Robert Barr, was kind and gracious as she taught the wives the required rituals of formal calls, down to the accepted technique of leaving one's calling card.

The Multer's daughter, now Donna Ward, recalls the nearly three years on the base from the stories her parents told her over the years.

Born in October of 1943, four months after the Multers were posted to POD, she was the "fussy baby" when the colonel's wife came to call.

The depot was humming and another story Donna's mother, Marjorie Multer, loved to recall was about the truck drivers being "terrorized" by a little girl, Deanie Green, an officer's daughter who delighted in riding her tricycle in the middle of the busy depot roads.

Carl Multer separated from the Army in 1946 and the family moved into Pueblo, but remained connected to POD when Multer took a civilian job at the base.

"Dad was always one of the first to arrive, to open the gates, and he worked long hours," Ward wrote.

She has the sense that he was a demanding but respected man who was totally dedicated to equipping the troops and maintaining an arsenal of weapons until he retired in 1975, but particularly during the Korean conflict.

And he was among the group of men who literally dug the depot's swimming pool so the children of the members of the officers' club could have a place to swim. It became a great gathering place.

Carl Multer traveled a great deal and Ward, his daughter, still has a charm bracelet laden with charms from places he visited.

Ward herself worked two summers at the depot, first in 1961 when she was just out of high school. "I took typing in high school and in those days we all took the civil service exam. I don't know why."

She was a clerk-typist in the adjutant's office and recalls having to type orders that had to be "absolutely correct with no erasures and multiple carbons. The language was Greek to me and often I'd be near the end when my finger wandered to the wrong key. I had to start over from the beginning."

Ward now works at the Colorado Mental Health Institute in Pueblo. ★



*The "depot baby" Donna Ward, at left, and Marilyn Thompson, public affairs officer at Pueblo Chemical Depot, share memories on the porch of the base house where Ward lived with her parents back in 1943. Thompson presently lives in a house on base and enjoys living in the "ultimate gated community."*

## Thompson enjoys life in 'ultimate gated community'

Marilyn Thompson likes to say. "I live in the ultimate gated community." Gated indeed.

As public affairs officer at Pueblo Chemical Depot, Thompson has lived on the depot since she arrived in February of 1991.

Her job made her eligible to rent a house – she's lived in three – and her two dogs and a cat made the depot the ideal (and perhaps only) place she'd be welcome.

She's never regretted the decision to live there instead of in Pueblo proper.

"I love the peace and quiet," she said recently.

Her pet family has grown to four dogs (the kitty died). She likes big dogs, golden retriever and shepherd mixes, but her most recent addition is a border collie mix a worker rescued last May after it had been wandering the depot for six weeks.



*In this old photo, the Pueblo Army Depot looks like a typical U.S. Army base, but old timers say it was much more.*

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Thompson named the collie Ginny for the woman who finally caught her.

And she doesn't mind in the least that security has ratcheted up since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

When she arrived, security was merely one guard on duty at the gatehouse.

But she got an immediate introduction to the post's wit.

"The first day I had to go into Pueblo for a meeting at night. As I was leaving the guard asked me where I was going and when would I be back.

"I said about 9:30, but the meeting ran long so I was wondering if I needed to call. Then it struck me: I'm an adult and the guard was just teasing me."

Thompson knew the depot well before 1991.

She worked for one year at what was then Pueblo Army Depot in 1968-69. Her then husband was hired as a supply intern in the ammunition division. She got a job too, but had to report earlier – on a Sunday.

She checked into a local motel and began getting ready for her first day at work – washing her hair and putting it up on rollers – when the phone rang.

It was her new boss, Carl Dazzio Sr., with the announcement "I will be by to pick you up to come to dinner at my house with my wife and me."

Protests did no good, so off she went – curlers and all – with only 20 minutes notice.

The Dazzios treated her so nicely; she still remembers it as "a great welcome to Pueblo." ★

## Austin recalls teamwork by calibration crew

There have been many missions at the depot over the years including testing of critical equipment for the U.S. military in the 1950s and '60s by a dedicated team. Known as the calibration section, the unit consisted of only 11 men, led first by Mark A. Morris, then Bernard Austin beginning in 1956, Austin recalls.

Overall, the mission was the maintenance and storage of non-nuclear components of nuclear weapons. It operated under the auspices of the Atomic Energy Commission and the Armed Forces Special Weapons Project at Sandia near Albuquerque, N.M.

The calibration section had the job of verifying the accuracy of what Austin describes as "critical items of weapons testing equipment."

Austin recalls that the team's highly specialized work took them throughout the United States and to Japan, Korea, Alaska, Germany and Italy.

The program was later administered by the U.S. Army Ammunition Command at Joliet, Ill., and in the mid-'60s the special weapons mission was moved to the U.S. Army Red River Depot at Texarkana, Texas.

Austin remains intensely proud of the unit's work, its important responsibility and the success that a small group of people from the depot managed to achieve throughout the world.

In addition to Morris and Austin, the calibration section included Edward Archuleta, Joseph Eddleman, George Coure, William Hopper, George Lowrance, Wesley Moore, Alex Toth, Rodney Williams and Miles Yeagley. ★

## Never rile a badger — or an employee, either

Sometimes it's not wise to rile up either people or animals.

On the other hand, it can produce hearty laughs for bystanders.

It was in February of 1979, only about six months after Jerry Caro had signed on at the depot that he had his first big laugh.

Working the swing shift as a security guard, he was called to help another officer.

As Caro tells it, when he arrived the officer "showed me a badger that he wanted me to help him catch. The badger was cornered and very angry. I told him he was crazy and I wasn't going to help him in this crazy endeavor."

Caro returned to his patrol.

A little while later, Caro heard the officer on the radio asking the desk sergeant for help – for three flat tires.

"The angry badger had slipped out of his confines and sliced the three tires before he ran off into the prairie."

Funny as that story is, Caro's personal favorite occurred some time later.

It seems that an employee was scheduled to receive an award for 2,500 hours without sick leave.

Trouble is, just the week before the scheduled ceremony, he had been given a

hard time when he requested a single day off.

So it was a very angry employee who showed up for the award, promptly tore it up and threw it in the presenter's face.

The brass wasn't happy, Caro, who still works at the depot in the chemical operations division, recalled, but everyone else got a good laugh out of the incident.

These lessons just teach you "that you don't want to make PCD badgers angry" – or employees either! ★

## Swartwood family counts three generations at depot

Dedicated hard work and tragedy marked three generations of the Swartwood family's tenure at the depot.

Elmer Swartwood, who worked there for only about six months in 1946, recalls the mixed highlights.

His grandfather, Jacob "Pop" Swartwood, was the first to work out there, as foreman of the Rover Boys, a cleanup crew that followed ammunition teams sweeping out storage igloos after munitions were stored or removed.

According to information in *The Pueblo Chieftain*, Swartwood's crew — with an average age of 58 — swept 90,000 square feet a day and in an undated photo listed the crew as Swartwood, Joe K. Garcia, Julian Sanchez, James Martin of Olney Springs, James A. Simmons, James Long and John C. Thompson.

Swartwood, a farmer from Kansas by way of Little Rock, Ark., went to work at the depot about the time it was activated in 1942. Two sons, James D. and Leonard E., worked there too.

James, Elmer's father, came to Colorado after being deluged by hail for five straight years near St. Francis, Kan.

After the last hailstorm, "he sold out then and there to the next door neighbor," Elmer Swartwood recalls.

James worked in the ammunition department where detonators were being removed from munitions.

In 1947, one of James' five children, Archie Lee Swartwood, headed out to the depot, also in the ammunition department.

According to newspaper accounts, on June 28, 1950, a fragmentation bomb exploded. It was being transferred from the defusing center to the plant where explosives were washed out. Archie Swartwood and Jake Gallegos of Avondale were killed and seven others injured.

They were the first fatalities at the Pueblo depot since it opened.

Archie was only days shy of his 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday. James resigned from the depot within days.

Meanwhile, Elmer joined the Coast Guard in 1943 and served on the first USS Pueblo, not the one that is held by North Korea. When he was mustered out in 1946, he drove a transport truck at the depot for six months.

Later, a cousin, Robert D. Christenson, worked at the depot until 1980 when he retired. ★



*In this 1961 Armed Forces Day parade, 1/4-ton trucks with mounted 106 mm guns pass in front of the reviewing stand on Main Street in Pueblo in front of the Thatcher Building.*

*Lt. Col. Eric L. Edwards, at right, congratulates Katherine S. Robertson, who was named PARdner of the Month for May 1970. Looking on is Tom Faltinow, who nominated Robertson for the award. Lt. Col. Edwards was director of maintenance for the depot.*





# Honoring the Past, Looking to the Future

## 'Copter crew comes to regret landing in restricted area

A group of Fort Carson soldiers may never forget the day their helicopter had to make an emergency landing at Pueblo Army Depot.

Neither will Robert L. Cordova.

A member of the security guard force between 1977 and 1980, he was on duty when the 'copter landed in a section of the grounds that had been fenced off for years.

"No one was allowed in," recalls Cordova who says that, according to stories he heard on the base, lightning struck an area at Patrol and Aviation roads some time in the early '50s. The strike scattered ammunition throughout the immediate area so that it became a restricted area.

Unfortunately, the helicopter pilot didn't know that and picked what seemed to be a nice flat spot for his landing.

Instead, the security guard service had to drive out to rescue them. Cordova volunteered for the job and drove a light truck straight to the 'copter.

However, the soldiers could not ride back in the truck, lest the added weight set off some of the buried rounds. So they trudged behind Cordova, following his tracks to safety.

Earlier, on April 8, 1975, Cordova and fellow worker Herman Lujan saved the lives of two men who were overcome by toxic fumes while they were cleaning a metal processing tank. Cordova and Lujan jumped into the pit where the collapsed men lay and dragged them out.

On June 25, 1976, both men received the Official Commendation Medal for Meritorious Performance of Duty from the U.S. Army commander. Cordova received a medical discharge in 1998 after 26 years at the depot, but he may also have set some sort of record in family members who have worked at the depot.

Not including him, they number a baker's dozen: a brother, John; two uncles, Skip Trujillo and Tony Cordova; two aunts, Jennie Chacon and Josie Trujillo; seven cousins, Ray and John Gurule, Ray Cordova, Ellis Hawks, Lucille Flores, Mary Maestas and Berha Jaquez, and a nephew, Elbert Cordova. ★

## Ancient artifacts found along depot stream

On a base literally loaded with modern ammunition, a petrified wood knife could be the rarest of weapons.

That's exactly what Leo Kimmitt found. Kimmitt was a chemist in the chemical lab of the depot, also called the ammunition area.

A nearby stream, Boone Creek, was their source of fresh water and Kimmitt liked to walk along it during noon breaks.

He knew the area had once been a Native American campground, because occasional shards of pottery were spotted.

But his enthusiasm pegged up notches when he found his first arrowhead.

Noon breaks became regular searches for arrowheads, a collection that grew to about a dozen before he retired in the spring of 1977 after 22 years.

But the most prized find was what he describes as "probably a carved knife" that he later discovered was made of petrified palm wood, something never native to the area, even in ancient times.

Kimmitt has given the collection to his daughter, but even today at 88 he wonders in awe what stories that knife could tell. ★

## Currington was foreman in ammunition area

Thelma Currington thinks she may have been the only woman foreman at the depot, at least before she retired in 1985. And this was no desk jockey job.

Currington had been in ammunition since she went to work on Jan. 2, 1951. At first she was a munitions handler, but soon was promoted to checker.

And she remembers how cold it was in the magazine area where they had only a small space heater for warmth while they worked loading 50- and 30- caliber ammunition onto conveyor belts.

Then she moved to general supply as a packer in a much warmer building. There they repacked nuts and bolts and just about everything else to fill orders.

In 1982 she was named foreman for the ammunition area.

Currington is proud of her accomplishments, but equally proud of being named PArDner of the Year in 1976. That wasn't only for her job efficiencies, but for her community service, most notably at Bethlehem Baptist Church. ★



Thelma Currington

## Early perimeter guards patrolled on horseback

The early signs marking the perimeter of today's Pueblo Chemical Depot read simply "Military Reservation."

Frederick R. Beck should know. He put up enough of them.

Beck joined the fledgling depot just as work was beginning and he dragged chain for surveyors as well as posting the signs.

In those days, he recalls, the perimeter of the base was guarded by men on horseback, literally riding fence.

Beck came from Oklahoma to Colorado in 1939 to work for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the Uncompahgre National

Forest, but he switched to the depot.

The Army was not only building the depot, but the air base that is now Pueblo Memorial Airport, and Beck was among those who hauled supplies to both sites from the old Devine station.

In May of 1943, he joined the Army Air Corps in special service and became a flight engineer. But when he returned to the depot in 1946, his old job in ordnance wasn't waiting for him.

As a result, he spent the remainder of his career with the Santa Fe Railroad. ★

## Working with missiles confirms Zero Defects is good policy

"We fix missiles to kill people and we don't want it to be our people."

Harold Day may have been a stern taskmaster as chief of the missile maintenance division, but that pithy remark explains why.

"With missiles there was no latitude for error, no latitude for learning," Day says flatly to this day.

There was a constant challenge of new technology and when the demand for parts – a chassis or components or whatever — the depot added a shift between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m.

A Zero Defects policy push in 1965 was right up Day's alley.



*Harold Day, center, inspects a Nike missile. The other two men in this undated photo are not identified.*

Its bright yellow promotion brochure claims the first spot in his notebook of memories.

Zero Defects "means prevention, not detection," it proclaimed, adding that "It's up to you."

Day arrived at the depot in January of 1946, fresh out of the Navy.

In later years the depot overhauled and tested missiles such as the Pershing II, the Nike and the Sargeant as well as related equipment such as launchers, radars and computers.

He recalls with pride the completion in 1965 of the \$2.3 million overhaul of a missile test unit.

Then there was the \$38,000 spent for a 40-ton door in one of the buildings so it could accommodate the Pershing II. "Or was it \$40,000 for a 38-ton door," he quips.

Day was involved in community work as well as the long days and nights at the job. He would talk to classes as far away as La Junta and was a staunch supporter of then-Southern Colorado State College and the classes it offered in specialties the depot needed.

Commendations and awards were plentiful over the years but one still stands out.

He considers it "a real pat on the back" when the United States sold the Hawk missile system to Israel and "the only place they would take missiles from was this depot."

Day retired in June of 1973.

He became a founding member of the P.D.A. Reuse Commission, created by the Pueblo Council of Governments in 1993 as a citizen panel to plan for the future of the depot. In 1994, after the state legislature created the P.D.A. Development Authority, the commission moved under its umbrella.

He left the commission in 2001 and today he and Dorothy enjoy their home and farm outside Boone.

A prized American flag that once flew over one corner of the nation's capitol now shows its colors for every special patriotic occasion. ★



# Honoring the Past, Looking to the Future



An article about the Podets in the June 2003 issue of *Pueblo Lore*, a publication of the Pueblo County Historical Society, features photos of the first Podet's team in 1946, citing that the women were the 1946 class B state champions. Members of that team are front row, left to right, Eloisa "Tuffy" Maldonado, Loree "Pi" Sanford; second row, Not identified, Lupe Cano, Dolores (surname not listed), Jackie Cash, Alice Dall; third row, Corky McGee, Ruth Hulsey, Josephine Baldwin, Pat Whitmore, Kay Hall (subject of the article below), fourth row, Catharine Whitmore, manager, and Urie Potter, coach.

The team's winning ways continued. The reproduction of the front page of a 1948 issue of the Pueblo Ordnance Depot employee newsletter boasts that the Podets were state champions again in 1948. And the Pueblo Lore article features another photo of the Podets team that won the 1949 state championship. (The team name was sometimes spelled "Podettes.")

## Women's softball team wins trophies for the Colonel

Play ball!!!!

The men at the depot had their softball team, but so did the women.

Known as the "Podets," they were an ubiquitous team that shuffled assignments as the lineup demanded.

Kay Hall was one of those Podets in the early days. "I guess I was utility and outfield," she said.

The team traveled throughout Colorado in an Army bus with an Air Force driver.

"We all worked full-time and played off-hours and paid our own way except for equipment," she wrote. Sometimes they rode all night and arrived at the depot just in time to go to work.

They regularly brought trophies home for the colonel.

"Col. Keck used to say, 'As long as you keep bringing back trophies, you have my support.'"

Hall doesn't remember the colonel's first name (Charles). "We all called him Col. Keck."

But she does remember most of the names of her teammates. There was Alice Dall at center field and Josephine Baldwin in left field. Pitcher was Loree Sanford with Patricia Whitmore catching. Ruth Hulsey played first and Jackie Cash was shortstop. On third was Eloisa Maldonado who changed her name to Elizabeth Martinez.

Hall couldn't remember everyone. There was "Butch" and there was "Red," but she couldn't recall their real names.

Hall began working at the depot in 1951 as an ordnance receiving clerk. She recalls how cold the winters were on the cement railroad docks. She transferred to the warehouse – blessed indoors – to set up shipping and receiving procedures for the

department and to organize the warehouse. From there it was to vehicle checking, inspecting and handled paperwork for trucks, half-tracks and tanks headed for Korea. Finally, she moved to the auditing office, working for both the depot auditors and the GAO auditors from both the Army and Air Force.

Hall quit in 1956 to be married, but returned in 1958 for a two-year stint.

Meanwhile, her mother, Joy G. Hall, worked in personnel from about 1948 until she retired in 1955. A professional musician, she would play piano for the NCO dances. She died in 1984.

Kay Hall, who now lives in Denver, remembers "good old POD" and the great times there. "Many people don't remember when it was a really big effort with about 5,000 employees; we all felt we added to the Korean war effort." ★

## About this 'memory book'

This publication was coordinated by Marilyn Thompson and Lori Waters of the Pueblo Chemical Depot Public Affairs Office. Marilyn and Lori arranged interviews with former employees and collected the historical photos, newsletters and other historical treasures you see on these pages from archives and individuals.

The feature stories from former depot employees were written by Gail Pitts, recent retiree from *The Pueblo Chieftain*.



## On the Cover

This collage of photos from the 1960s and '70s provides a look back in time that is sure to bring back memories for employees past and present. At top is the gate that welcomed so many over the years. Beside the gate is the Pueblo Army Depot missile exhibit that was often displayed at community events and parades. In the center, one of the many women employees works on an assembly line in 1971. At bottom of page, in this 1964 photo, a team of military maintenance personnel from Fort Carson observes the rebuilding of an 8-inch howitzer, self-propelled, in the depot tank rebuild shop.



# Honoring the Past, Looking to the Future

## Pueblo Depot: sixty-two years of service to the nation

The story of the Pueblo Chemical Depot began in 1941 when the government selected a location east of the City of Pueblo and acquired about 20,000 acres of land. Construction began in February 1942, and the first carload of ammunition was received in August of that year. The facility was originally named Pueblo Ordnance Depot.

Although originally planned for the storage and supply of ammunition, the facilities were soon expanded to receive, store, and issue general supplies to support the troops in World War II.

In 1946, the depot was assigned the mission of maintaining and overhauling artillery fire control and optical equipment. Two years later, ammunition renovation and demilitarization were added to the mission.

During the Korean era, shipments of general supplies and ammunition increased, and the depot reached its highest civilian strength of nearly 8,000 employees. Missile maintenance was added to the depot's mission in the 1950s, and in 1962 it was renamed the Pueblo Army Depot.

The missile maintenance mission, with the exception of maintenance of the Pershing missile, was transferred to Letterkenny Army Depot in Pennsylvania in 1974. In 1976, Pueblo was given "depot activity" status and assigned to the Tooele Army Depot Complex.

During Vietnam, and again during Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the depot shipped supplies and ammunition to support troops on the battlefield.

In December 1987, the United States and the then-Soviet Union signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Pueblo was assigned to do disassembly and elimination of missiles and in 1988 Soviet inspectors and other dignitaries came to Pueblo to witness destruction of Pershing II missiles.

Also in 1988, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission designated the Depot for realignment. In 1996 the installation was renamed Pueblo Chemical Depot.

Over the years, the depot has performed several unusual missions, including:

- Housing Italian prisoners of war during World War II.
- Storing a portion of Hitler's German war art (subsequently returned to the National Archives and to Germany).
- Storing nearly five billion (never-used) gas rationing coupons printed as a contingency by the Federal Energy Administration during the energy crisis of 1974-75. The coupons were later destroyed.

Today the Pueblo Chemical Depot's activities include remediating environmental contamination to facilitate future reuse of the property, safely storing the chemical weapons, and preparing for the Pueblo Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant. ★

## *Our Mission*

Safely and securely store chemical weapons on the Pueblo Chemical Depot while setting the conditions to return depot land and facilities to the Pueblo community.

## Chronology of Commanders Pueblo Chemical Depot Pueblo, Colorado

Maj. H. H. Morse	April 1942-December 1942
Col. Robert S. Barr	December 1942-November 1945
Col. Joseph Horridge	November 1945-January 1947
Col. Charles H. Keck	January 1947-May 1953
Col. Ray O. Welch	June 1953-September 1954
Col. J. M. Henderson	October 1954-June 1956
Col. Walter F. Partin	July 1956-July 1960
Col. Robert W. Grote	August 1960-January 1962
Col. Louis Antol, Jr.	June 1962-March 1966
Col. Donald H. Greeley	September 1966-April 1968
Col. John T. Andrews, Jr.	October 1968-February 1972
Col. William P. Hooker	March 1972-May 1974
Col. John E. Donaldson	July 1974-July 1975
Col. Carl G. Davaz	July 1975-September 1976
Col. James D. Bates	October 1976-February 1978
Col. Herman R. Betke	March 1978-August 1980
Col. Michael E. Hill	August 1980-June 1981
Col. Kenneth I. Kawano	August 1981-August 1984
Lt. Col. James R. Henderson	August 1984-May 1985
Lt. Col. Norman J. Andrews	June 1985-June 1987
Lt. Col. Bernard P. Thomas	June 1987-July 1989
Lt. Col. John C. Rickman	July 1989-July 1991
Lt. Col. Carmen J. Spencer	July 1991-July 1993
Lt. Col. Jackey L. Edwards	July 1993-July 1995
Lt. Col. Patrick K. Fogleson	July 1995-August 1997
Lt. Col. Paul B. Short	August 1997-August 1999
Lt. Col. John J. Megnia	August 1999-August 2001
Lt. Col. John F. Driftmier	August 2001-November 2002
Lt. Col. John A. Becker	February 2003-present



## Depot couple celebrates 50th

Love can strike in the most unlikely places.

For Pete Paripovich and Lois Wiseman it was the dispensary at the depot in 1951. "It was love at first sight, for me anyway," Paripovich recalled recently.

He was returning to the depot after 18 months of active military duty, which required a new physical exam. She was scheduled for a physical after accepting a job as secretary to the post's provost marshal.

Paripovich says he "mooched a ride" into town with her, but she wasn't smitten enough to drive him to his door, although they lived only nine blocks apart.

Nevertheless, the couple was married in February of 1954 and this year celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

Lois worked at the depot for about five years, then left to earn a teaching certificate, a master's degree and a 30-year career at Pueblo School District 60.

Pete, who first went to work at the base in 1946, stayed on in the roads and grounds division until he retired in 1984.

One experience he remembers somewhat ironically was working on pouring concrete for a pad at a building where mustard agent "was going to be destroyed." ★



*Pete and Lois Paripovich*

## Concerns and ideas welcome at Dude Ranch Club

You'd never guess that the depot was the site of a Dude Ranch.

But Alfred Pino remembers it well in the days when Lt. Col. John Rickman was commander.

Rickman organized the "Dude Ranch" as a way for staff and supervisors to get to know each other and exchange serious ideas, deep concerns or just "pet peeves," Pino recalls. It even spawned some instant Dean Martin-type roasts to spotlight as a comedic reproach.

Later, when the depot was commended for its performance in the first joint Soviet/American missile elimination under the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, Pino also notes that it was an observation by Robert Andrews, chief of supplies, to put it into perspective.

"Praise was being shoveled out on how well this or that supervisor or area performed," Pino wrote. Then Andrews quietly com-

mented that "the supervisors and staff had indeed performed their jobs well; however, it was the employees who had executed their jobs with distinction."

That brought a toast to all the employees of Pueblo Depot Activity from the Dude Ranch club members.

Pino, a native of Raton, N.M., joined the depot in March of 1987 after a 20-year military career. He began as chief of the ammunition storage division, and then moved to chief of planning, production and control. He served as chief of storage and distribution during Desert Storm.

Pino left the depot at the end of 1991 to become the director of the U.S. Government Distribution Center at the Pueblo Industrial Park. Today his responsibility has expanded to director of product storage and distribution for the entire government printing office. In addition to Pueblo, it includes the Laurel, Md., Distribution

center and the depository library center in Washington, D.C. ★



*Ground was broken in February 1970 for a new maintenance facility at the Pueblo Army Depot for the Hawk guided missile.*

# Honoring the Past, Looking to the Future

## Trepidation about new job turned to enthusiasm

When Sioux Army Depot in Sidney, Neb., was closed and Virginia and Gilbert Negrete transferred to Pueblo Army Depot in March of 1967, she almost quit on her first day.

She would have to leave her two sons, ages 11 and 13, at home 14 miles away. At Sioux her house was only four blocks away from work.

But she stuck it out, fascinated by the new computer system.

In her specialty of transportation officer, she was delighted when Pueblo became the pilot depot for the government's new computer bill of lading.

A little thing to mention, but huge in enhancing transportation jobs.

Any emergency in the world could bring a call to ship equipment on a moment's notice. When a mudslide devastated portions of Puerto Rico, "we shipped a complete bridge to them."

And Virginia Negrete was in the thick of it, as the department coordinated airlifts and saw to the final movement of stocks to the designated strategic location.

Pueblo's closure as a depot and change to Pueblo Depot Activity was the second time she had organized a closure or partial one as traffic manager. She did the same thing when the Sioux depot was closed, working much of the time by computer from Pueblo.

Transportation was only moved, not closed, and it became a



*U.S. Army "loadmaster" personnel tie down Pueblo Army Depot material in the cargo bay of a giant C5A transport plane at the Pueblo Memorial Airport on May 3, 1972. Arrival of the aircraft was a first for the Pueblo airport and the shipment of depot material by a C5A was a first for the Pueblo Army Depot.*

scheduled airline ticket office, able to provide ready tickets to all travelers.

"Transportation was unique in that we related to all phases of industry as they related to our movement of things and people."

Gilbert retired three years before she did in 1993. They live in Pueblo.

But she looks back at her job with love and as the opportunity for a satisfying career. ★

## Negrete recalls demolition work at 'God's Little Acre'

Gilbert Negrete approached his job with extreme care and always pulled it off with a bang.

Negrete was the demolition expert at the depot from March of 1967 until he retired in November of 1990.

He called the demolition grounds "God's Little Acre" because he always prayed that the particular job would go off perfectly.

Although the job primarily was the destruction of obsolete ammunition, Negrete shone in some outstanding events.

In 1987 when President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Mikhail Gorbachev signed the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in Iceland, Negrete represented Pueblo. Among other things, the treaty called for the elimination of the Pershing II missiles and Negrete's work that day made news on the CNN channel.

Later he worked with the Russians (then Soviets) on the further Pershing destruction.

And it wasn't only on the depot where Negrete's work was appreciated.

He participated in the groundbreaking celebration for the Pueblo dam in the summer of 1970, part of the Frying Pan-Arkansas Project

to divert and store water from the Western Slope. The project had been approved by Congress and signed by President John F. Kennedy in 1962.

As serious and precise as Negrete was when he was working, he could let his hair down and was a great success when other employees got a crack at him in the dunking pool at a depot party. ★

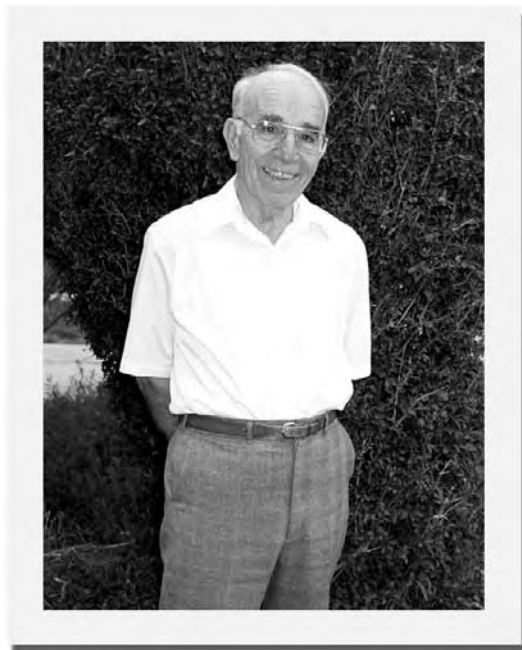


*Thousands of people saw these Pueblo Army Depot Hawk missiles at area community events and parades.*

## Tanks from Pueblo star in Hollywood movie

How do you drill a 2-foot-square hole in the turret of a World War II Sherman tank? Very carefully and very slowly.

"I can't tell you how many pants I ruined" from the molten metal blowback, John Giarratano recalls. He and his crew drilled the large hole through 4-inch thick steel on two sides of the turret. Then they drilled another large hole in the body of the tank.



John Giarratano

The project was to modify the tank for filming in Warner Brother's 1955 movie, *Target Zero*, starring Charles Bronson. The cameramen needed to be able to shoot the actual interior of the tank.

Giarratano was assigned to lead the team by foreman Lew Finlayson and although he had been assured that the job could be done, he knew that it would be a big job for the acetylene torches.

The first drills would simply melt some of the steel which "blew back" toward the worker since it had nowhere else to go. Then there were the hard spots in the cast metal which added to the task.

The hole in the front of the body of the tank – only 2-inches thick – was much easier, he recalled, and the movie crew built a sham metal patch to cover that hole for exterior shots at Fort Carson.

The job took three months, but was only one of several challenges Giarratano faced before he retired in 1975.

### Early Days of Transportation Center

The land north of the depot was miles of barren range land, until the Department of Transportation decided to test a high-speed electric locomotive there.

It would be the first six miles of what has become today the world-famous Transportation Technology Center.

The locomotive, known then as the LIMRV (linear induction motor vehicle), was powered by an electric "third rail," an aluminum rail between the two regular rails.

Twenty-one inches high with a 5-inch base, the extruded aluminum arrived in lengths between 80 and 120 feet.

As foreman of the depot's machine shop, it was Giarratano's job to figure out how to machine each end of every section so they could be welded to create a perfectly smooth rail.

The specification was that there could be no more than .005-inch gap between the top and bottom of the sections. And this had to be accomplished on site without the help of a precision milling machine back at the shop.

Giarratano is still proud that they managed the job with no more than a .003-inch gap and, in some instances, a snug no-tolerance fit.

He and other depot employees were in the bleachers in 1972 when then Secretary of Transportation John Volpe took the first ride in the locomotive on the electric track. ★

## Trisler pulled all-nighter on loading elevator

No matter how long – or short – a time employees worked at what is now the Pueblo Chemical Depot, tidbits of memories remain decades later.

Robert E. Trisler was a lonely 26-year-old in 1942 when he left a farm job near Avondale to help build a guard house at the new Pueblo Ordnance Depot.

"I was a laborer, carried boards for the carpenters, did what they needed," Trisler said recently.

One thing that was greatly needed was gravel for roads; it was hauled from a nearby gravel pit, but one afternoon the loading elevator broke.

They tapped Trisler to fix it. "I worked all night," he said.

After the guard house – halfway up the hill – was completed, he briefly joined a crew working on the munitions igloos.

All that was packed into only about six months before Trisler went back to a lifetime on the farm. Today at 88 those memories are still vivid. ★



# Honoring the Past, Looking to the Future

## Andrews remembers tours of German war art collection

One of the things Norman Andrews enjoyed most during his two-year tour as commander of the depot in the mid-'80s was taking groups of visitors to tour the warehouse that held German "war art."

Confiscated by the United States near the close of World War II, some 6,000 paintings were shipped to Pueblo for storage. The depot's location with low humidity and moderate climate was ideal, Andrews recalls.

The paintings by German artists were designed to glorify the "master race."

"They depicted brave young German soldiers and others doing courageous things for the Fatherland," Andrews wrote.

In 1987, near the end of his tour here, the paintings were sealed and prepared for shipping back to Germany. Of the 6,000 items, all but 600 were returned. The 600 were ones that included the Nazi swastika and were sent to another U.S. warehouse.

With new missions coming the depot's way, the then-Lieutenant Colonel found Pueblo Depot Activity exciting.

First, the depot was part of cleaning up many rounds of chemical ammo that had been declared hazardous. The drill and transfer system, or DATS as it was known, used a special equipment that traveled from depot to depot.

It was another instance when the Army laid out its plans to the Pueblo community and answered citizens' concerns, he recalls. That was followed by a media tour of the facility, including the



*Lt. Col. Norman Andrews in his official portrait as depot commander during 1985-87*

demilitarization equipment. Although they had help from other depots, "it was mostly a lot of our guys sweating through the work wearing protective clothing that was anything but comfortable."

It was extra work for others too, including security, so when the program was completed without causing any danger to the local population, "we were not sorry to say farewell" to the DATS equipment.

When Andrews arrived at the depot in 1985, it was just completing the task of shipping Pershing missiles to be deployed in Europe. "Later it turned out that the presence of those missiles was instrumental in bringing the Cold War arms race to an end."

Then the depot received a new mission: the storage and maintenance of miles and miles of pipe and accompanying pumping stations.

They were to be ready at a moment's notice to ship anywhere in the world to be used to carry petroleum or drinking water to remote theaters of operation.

Andrews thinks having Pueblo Memorial Airport (built as an air base) nearby helped bring the project to Pueblo.

"It was a considerable effort to accommodate the equipment and figure out how to keep it combat ready," Andrews wrote.

The depot also modified some warehouse space to barracks for Army Reserve units to live while they practiced setting up a pipeline. "Who would know that the days were coming when the use of such equipment could be called for in such a place as the Persian Gulf?"

Andrews retired when he left Pueblo and he and his wife, Ginny, returned to Andrews' hometown, Raleigh, N.C., where they opened a wine shop. "Maybe soon we will 'retire' from a second career," he wrote.

At the same time, the couple still enjoys the memory of meeting so many people, sitting on the reviewing stands at parades and attending services at First United Methodist Church. ★



*Here is the caption describing these August 21, 1972, photos: "The U.S. Army historical art collection stored at the Pueblo Army Depot was the subject of a special visit on August 21 by some 40 members of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Officer's Club at the depot. Host for this visit was Capt. L.L. (Swede) Nelson. Descriptions of the paintings were provided by Michael Churilla. Among those participating in the special program were Mrs. William F. Hooker, Mrs. Vincent Potestio and Mrs. Jerome K. Vaughan."*

## Friendly greetings and fond memories endure

“Hi PODner!”

That greeting from a hand-signaling smiling silhouetted figure used to greet entrants to the depot.

Named as a reflection of then-Pueblo Ordnance Depot, it was the particular pride of Jim G. Tucker who returned from service in World War II to join the roads and grounds department. (Today the greeting has been modified to “PArDners” for Pueblo Army Depot.)

He soon became an engineering equipment operator in time to be part of the crew that built the familiar “Hi PODner” Park. In those days, the park was resplendent with swings made from Army vehicle tires; and barbecue pits fashioned from shell casings. Tucker’s daughter, Marie, recalls that he would take out-of-town family and close friends to “his” park which he made sure was always meticulously tended.

Even after his retirement in 1970 he would drive out to the depot to check on the park. Tucker died in 1982.

Two daughters, Marie and Ida, followed their father to the depot, in office jobs.

Marie began work at what was by 1967 the Pueblo Army Depot that employed about 4,000 with a mission to repair Vietnam-ravaged jeeps, armored personnel carriers and other vehicles.

Marie Tucker recalls watching the bullet-riddled vehicles arrive on flatbed railroad cars.

It gave a renewed sense of pride and dedication to the employees, no matter what sort of job they had.

They “were into total quality management and customer service long before

these terms became popular buzz words,” she wrote recently.

Those were the days when the sight of green Army buses was common in Pueblo as they shuttled employees back and forth to the base east of town. That was special too, she remembers, because it was a chance to meet employees from other departments.

Marie left in 1972 and Ida worked in the office for a year longer.

More than 30 years later, both women, who now live in Lakewood, Colo., are still proud that their family was part of the depot family that played a “vital role in our national defense.”

And they still treasure friendships they made on the base and on the bus. ★

## Three workplace romances blossom into marriage

They worked in buildings just across the street from each other, but it took several years and the introduction by a school chum for Doris Kefner and Floyd Park to meet.

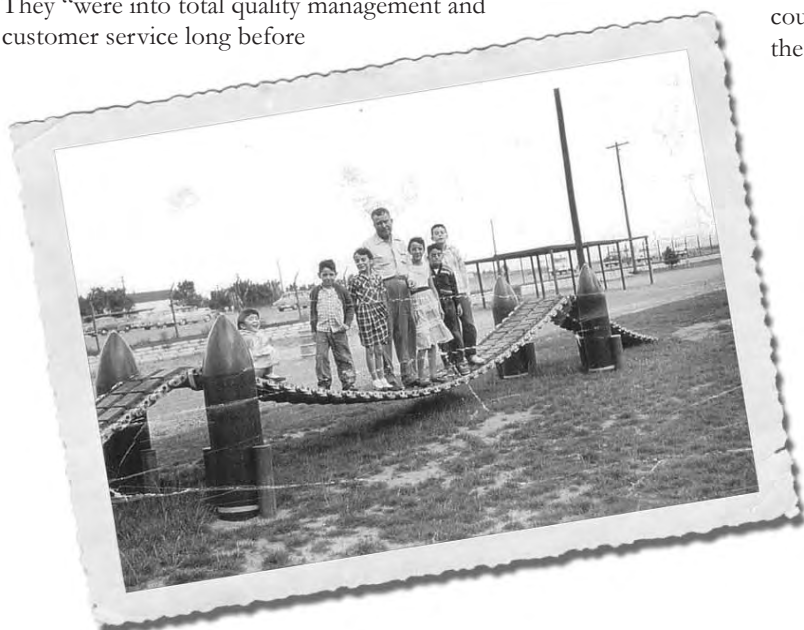
Then they enjoyed a three-year courtship that included a lot of base softball games.

“Floyd played softball for the depot team,” she recalls.

Doris began working as a secretary in 1955 and retired in 1996. Floyd started work in fire control about the same time and retired in 1991.

They were married in 1961, the same summer two other depot couples were wed. They were Noel Alvarez and Martin Abeyta, and Beverly Smith and Harry Ripple.

Although the Parks, still living in Pueblo, have lost track of the other couples, Doris Park still remembers fondly the party their friends at the depot had for the six of them. ★



Marie Tucker and her family stand on the swinging bridge made from a tank tread in Hi PODner Park in 1957. Tucker is second from left.



In this depot social event around 1960, Doris Kefner and Floyd Park are the couple on the left.

# Honoring the Past, Looking to the Future

## Work at depot is important to Sena family

Throughout its history the depot has provided income for literally thousands of families in Southeastern Colorado.

And it's a theme that present and former employees repeat.

Victor Sena, currently the industrial equipment operator supervisor, is one of them.

Sena's father, Rolando Sena, went to work as a security guard in October of 1952, commuting every day from La Junta, a long drive.

The family eventually moved into Pueblo.

"He raised eight children while working here and we children never did without," Victor Sena recalls.

His father retired in 1981 and three years later Victor joined the depot as a security guard. He had been laid off from his job at steel maker CF&I.

He quickly became a production machinery mechanic, but in January of 1991 a reduction in force took him to Peterson Air Force base where Sena did double duty as an aircraft mechanic for the civilian



◀ In this undated photo, Edward N. Kovack steam cleans a trailer for the Major Items Branch of General Supply at the depot. Vehicles and other major items were always cleaned before shipment to units in the field.



Two visitors check out a helmet and protective gear during Armed Forces Day in 1968.

side of Peterson and as an active Air Force reservist.

In May of this year Sena returned to Pueblo Chemical Depot in a supervisory capacity. A brother-in-law, John Aragon, was a chemical operations supervisor until his health forced him to retire. Sena currently has a cousin, Jim Reyes, in chemical operations and a brother-in-law, Dennis Gonzales, in security.

The depot "has been a part of our family for many years and we've made a lot of friends and we've had some good and bad times to remember through the years." ★

## Safety shoes also good for tap dancing

Even in the hard and serious work of the depot, sometimes "you just had to have fun," says Dorothy Steel who worked cleaning the firing mechanism for large artillery.

"They'd been under water and were pretty messy," Steel recalls although she doesn't know where they had been. The guns were brought in, knocked down, cleaned, put back together and repainted.

She was in a crew that disassembled the firing mechanisms which resembled big engines, cleaned them with acetone and reassembled them.

That was in the late '40s early '50s.

They all wore standard safety, steel-tipped shoes at work and, during breaks, they'd pick up an impromptu tap dancing routine.

"It was just something to act silly," she recalls.

Steel went to work at the depot about 1949. Then Dorothy Barr, she moved with her family to Florence after she graduated from high school in Sheridan Lake.

Steel joined her husband, Forrest, in Germany where he served two tours of duty.

After he was mustered out, they settled in Colorado Springs where they bought a tiny tractor company in 1963 and struggled to make it thrive. Their hard work paid off, although Forrest died in 1977.

Today she's the sole owner of Steel Tractor Co. which sells an upscale line of big and small lawn and garden equipment. ★





## Desert Storm brings famous U.S. Army general to Pueblo

An emergency phone call in the middle of the night. The order: airlift equipment out of the depot ASAP.

For transportation specialist, Juanita Steil it was an exciting time to be working there.

They would be “called out in the middle of the night to process and airlift, move by motor and rail carrier any emergency shipments,” Steil recalls.

It was the middle of the 1980s and Pueblo was the storage depot for the Army’s water purification equipment worldwide.

That storage later brought an unexpected visitor to the depot, Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf who led the American effort in Desert Storm.

Steil had the opportunity to meet Gen. Schwarzkopf and other notables because of

her job and also expanded her friendships to other depots where she was sent for various training classes.

Steil first went to work in the supply department in 1956, joining her father, Courtney W. Bradley, who worked in the tank rebuild operation.

Fresh out of high school, she remembers that they rode out to the depot together. Because of their shift differences, “I waited for him for half an hour in the morning and he waited a half an hour for me in the afternoon.”

Bradley, who joined the depot from the U.S. Forestry Service, about 1953, retired in May of 1966.

Steil left the base in 1963 but returned in 1978 to transportation operations and



*Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf*

worked there until she retired in 1993.

Steil, who lived in Pueblo, still considers “meeting deadlines” as “the most exciting part of my work.” ★

## ‘Boss’ still in charge at Blue household 44 years later

Phillip Blue swears that he married the boss.

In 1959 he was sent to help catch up on paperwork in the stock control branch of the depot. “My boss in this branch was Miss

Gracealee Rickman,” he wrote. Not only did they meet and marry, “guess what, she still is my boss.”

The couple celebrated their 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary on Sept. 1.

Blue’s career at the depot began in 1951 as a forklift operator in artillery. After a while, he became a supervisor in the armament branch and eventually went to fire control.

After serving several brief tours as an equipment specialist for the return material branch, he and his family moved permanently to Okinawa in 1971.

As branch chief there, his job was to sort out equipment that had been sent to Okinawa from Vietnam, equipment that was valuable and salvageable.

He retired in July of 1977 and the Blues returned to Pueblo.

Like other longtime employees, Blue has amassed a giant scrapbook, but he doesn’t have to refer to it as the memories tumble to mind:

- Helping build the swimming pool at the officers’ club and the new Hi PArDner Park with its safety equipment.
- Driving a prime mover with a 120-millimeter artillery weapon in one Armed Forces day parade and a float called “Pecos Pete” in another. Pete won the governor’s trophy that year.
- And, of course, meeting and marrying Gracealee. She worked at the depot for a decade, from 1952 to 1962. Her sister, Opal, was employed there too.

Today Blue looks back with pleasure on the “thousands of dear friends I had the pleasure to work with” and the sadness of the funerals he has attended. ★



*Gracealee Rickman Blue and Phillip Blue*

# Honoring the Past, Looking to the Future

## Rodriguez chronicles diverse, far-flung workforce

For many employees who spent several decades at the depot, it was often an ebb and flow of jobs as reductions in force (RIF) came and went.

Ruben Rodriguez has chronicled those changes during 32 years on the base and has also kept a meticulous record of the men he worked with, particularly other Hispanics.

For example, he notes that in 1962, out of 3,443 employees at Pueblo Ordnance Depot, between 32- and 41 percent had Spanish surnames.

Among his coworkers, he met Ben Trujillo from Ocate, N.M., and Ubaldo Garcia from Taos. He pointed them out because they were among the 32 Garcias and 47 Trujillos at the depot in 1962.

And he quotes Guillermo Leyba who drove a car pool in to work from Rocky Ford for 35½ years:

“Working at the P.D.A. was quite an experience and an opportunity to earn a good pension. In the early ‘50s there were few jobs, especially for Hispanic men and women, that paid good wages like those at the Pueblo Ordnance Depot.... I don’t think this area will ever see those kinds of jobs again.” (Leyba retired in 1988.)

Rodriguez himself commuted from his family’s farm east of Fowler, driving into town, then catching a bus at 6:45 a.m.

When Rodriguez began work as a laborer in October of 1954, there were about 8,000 employees at the depot. He records that they came from as far south as Walsenburg, east from La Junta, west from Canon City and some from Colorado Springs.



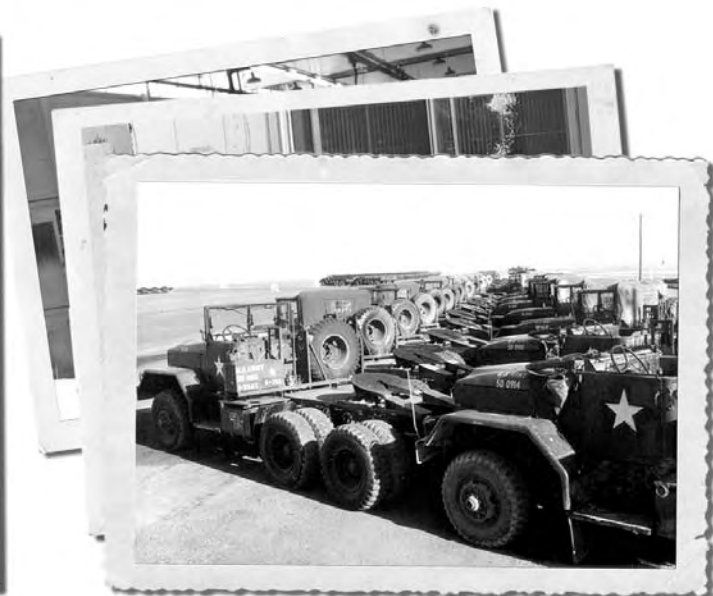
*Ruben Rodriguez picking peaches at his Pueblo home*

Rodriguez hired on at \$1.49 an hour with a payroll number of 19332, meaning he was the 19,332th person to be hired since the depot opened in 1942.

Later in his career, he bid for and got a job as foreman in the supply division that began his work as a heavy equipment foreman where he remained until he retired in October 1986 and is now treasurer of the Pueblo branch of the Hispanic Genealogical Society of America. ★



*In this undated photo, a Nike Zeus anti-missile missile was an important component of the North American Defense Command arsenal.*



*Tractor trucks, shown in foreground, and cargo trucks, shown in background, were processed at the Pueblo Army Depot for shipment to Southeast Asia in this February 1968 photo.*

## Next mission: destroying chemical weapons

The U.S. Army Pueblo Chemical Depot has performed many missions in its 62-year history, including storage of chemical weapons. Today, the depot is one of eight chemical weapons storage sites in the United States.

In 1997, the United States ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention, an international treaty prohibiting the development, production, stockpile and use of chemical weapons, as well as providing oversight for their destruction. In accordance with the treaty and Congressional direction, the Army is moving forward to destroy the chemical weapons stored near Pueblo.

The Program Manager for Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives (ACWA) is the Department of Defense agency responsible for the safe destruction of the Pueblo stockpile.


Beginning in 1997, ACWA conducted an open and fully participatory

process called the ACWA Dialogue to involve people living near chemical stockpiles in the assessment of alternative technologies to destroy assembled chemical weapons, like those stored at Pueblo. That fully participatory public involvement process continues today.

After a thorough evaluation, in July 2002 the Department of Defense selected neutralization followed by biotreatment to destroy the Pueblo chemical weapons stockpile.

In September 2002, the Army selected a contractor team headed by Bechtel National, Inc. that includes Parsons, Washington Group, Battelle, General Atomics, and General Physics. The Bechtel Pueblo Team will design, build, test, operate, and close the Pueblo Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant.

Working closely with the State of Colorado, the community, and the Colorado Chemical Demilitarization Citizens' Advisory Commission (CAC), along with a wide variety of stakeholders, the Bechtel Pueblo Team completed initial design and, in the summer of 2004, obtained the necessary permits to begin the first phase of construction. ★




**ACWA**  
Program Manager Assembled  
Chemical Weapons Alternatives


**Pueblo Chemical  
Agent-Destruction  
Pilot Plant Technology**


A Partnership for  
Safe Chemical  
Weapons  
Destruction


Neutralization followed by biotreatment uses hot water to neutralize the chemical agent, effectively destroying the mustard agent molecules. Ordinary bacteria then consume the neutralization by-product.


**Neutralization followed by Biotreatment:**

- 


1. Removing the Energetics  
Robotic equipment will remove the weapon's energetic components, including the fuse and burster.
- 

2. Removing the Mustard Agent  
To remove the agent, the body is robotically accessed and then the agent is washed out with pressurized water.
- 

3. Neutralizing the Energetics and Mustard Agent  
After the energetics and agent have been separated from the metal parts, they will be treated in separate tanks with a caustic solution and water respectively. The by-product from this process is called hydrolysate. The energetics hydrolysate and agent hydrolysate are then combined and further processed in Step Four.
- 

4. Biotreatment  
The hydrolysates will go through the biotreatment process, which consists of large tanks containing microbes that digest and further break down the solution. Water released from this process will be recycled, leaving various salts and biosludge. Biosludge, which is made up of microbe waste products and other bacterial matter, will be filtered to remove water and shipped offsite to a permitted treatment, storage and disposal facility.
- 

5. Disposing of the Metal Parts  
Although the metal parts were cleansed of energetics and agent in Step One and Step Two, they still may contain trace amounts of energetics and agent and need to be decontaminated to a higher level. This level is called "5X," a military standard of decontamination that ensures the metal is clean and safe for disposal. To reach this level of decontamination, the metal parts will be heated to 1,000° F for 15 minutes. The metal can then be recycled.



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



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(719) 546-0400  
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Other hours by appointment